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For Tom Turner

James T. Mackintosh

THE DEATH OF CLEOPATRA

By the same Author

A SON OF CAIN

IN THE WAKE OF THE PHŒNIX

IOLÄUS

ON THE FACE OF A STAR

THE RED, RED DAWN



# THE DEATH OF CLEOPATRA

A DRAMATIC POEM

AND

OTHER VERSES

BY

JAMES A. MACKERETH

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON  
NEW YORK, BOMBAY AND CALCUTTA

1920



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## FOREWORD

“THE DEATH OF CLEOPATRA” was written several years ago. I put it aside for some indefinite reason. Recently I re-read the poem. Despite inherent defects I thought it had poetic vigour and originality. I reflected that in choosing his theme a writer merely seeks a colourable excuse for expressing his own thoughts and imaginings.

I am not of those who contend that the poet should confine himself to local and contemporary subjects. The poet's province is at least as wide as the boundaries of humanity. To the imagination — the most god-like faculty of man, and the least respected — all days are as one day, and a queen who died twenty centuries ago is a woman

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who dies to-day. It seems to me that if we wish to treat a thing broadly and significantly in poetry we must treat it in a sense remotely — for the reason that the near facts of our own time tend to impede and oppress the free working of the imaginative faculty and to limit its horizon. When a far splendour of cumulus commands the eye why should we perversely turn therefrom and reserve our admiration for the rain-pool at our feet? The splendour is all the grander for being in the sky. So, if some great name or personality of the past quickens the poetic impulse why boggle at a name or an age? Whether a subject be remote or near is of small account, but the writer by the power of his art must give it a perennial and a human interest. If a poet choose for his theme one who has been long dead it may be because he has thereby greater liberty to present and interpret that which is eternally alive. Certain names and periods by

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reason of their associations more readily induce the general mind to accept certain poetic impressions. The poet is fully entitled to avail himself of these names and periods ; by so doing he enters a potential world of intenser realities and larger issues : a world where circumstances are fitted to latent possibilities in character, where the heroic is no longer arbitrarily ignored, nor the mean exalted, — a world wherein the heart is free to do the thing it wills. All vital art, as I have said elsewhere, is the out-reaching or up-reaching of man for more life, more light, it is a widening of the bounds of consciousness, it is the overflow of life itself.

No man may run away from the vital spirit of his time and remain true to himself. But let us be sure what that vital spirit is. Do not let us confuse it with the idiosyncrasies of the moment. It is a deeper thing. I make no attempt to elude my time. My attitude is authentically modern

## Foreword

though the theme is incidentally ancient. Personally I admire the poet who, assuring us that life is great and wonderful, chooses what to the thoughtless might be a commonplace subject, and, by the power of presentment and high poetic argument, persuades us to accept his vision of that greatness and wonder. Such a task would appeal to me to-day. Yet with such a subject a remoteness (as mentioned above) in treatment, since not in time, is essential to high poetic and artistic effect. The sublime in art is always the super-real, it is the soul's superscription on the face of fact. Poetry is not the portrayal of life, it is the intensification and illumination of life.

If it be contended that poetry must essentially contain some spiritual interpretation some, if I may use the term, progressive vision of life—then, in the face of such contention, I readily concede that this poem's claim to poetic interest is only in



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part justified. If, on the other hand, it be granted that a tragical presentment of human life—a presentment unlighted by the speculations of the philosopher and unilluminated by the spirituality of the seer, is poetically legitimate and desirable both as an end in itself, and as an aid to the widening of human sympathy, then I think it hardly presumptuous to ask for my poem a measure of consideration.

I may say that this Cleopatra of my imagination possesses the pride and pathos of a vivid and dominant personality caught in the toils of that inscrutable power which works about us all, and through us all, and which we call Fate. Her qualities and defects are primitive and persistent; under the veneer of our later civilization they exist in varying degrees to-day; but in Cleopatra they are obtrusively and proudly prominent because to her, a pagan queen, power was law to itself, it could dispense with all conventions and

## Foreword

gratify every impulse with impunity, flattered the while by the smiles of scycophants, and superficially approved by the humble acquiescence of slaves. My imaginary protagonist was too great, too wise to be wholly depraved, too human in her pride and passion to be devoid of tenderness. It was the persistent and complex femininity of the woman which attracted me.

Some emendations have been made in the poem, certain jejune touches removed, but it remains substantially as originally written. It is the product of an impulse gone long ago and which cannot be recalled. To-day I should have chosen another subject and employed another manner. Yet the poem seems to me to have merit sufficient to warrant its publication; had I not thought so it would never have been printed.

If I have anticipated criticism I neither expect nor desire leniency on that account.

The latter half of the volume consists of a

## Foreword

ballad and a few poems, grave and gay, which appeared years ago in various reviews and newspapers. One or two of these compositions by persistent resuscitations have frequently annoyed me since — lacking as they have done those little touches and emendations which the chill ordeal of print seldom fails to suggest to impetuous immaturity. That which a writer has once made public is his own no more ; with its defects upon it it drags him forth to judgment and invites his condemnation. I here perpetuate, I trust excusably, I believe a little more worthily, what I cannot destroy. About none of these poems do I entertain any illusion.

JAMES A. MACKERETH.

*Stocka House,  
Cottingley,  
Bingley.*



# THE DEATH OF CLEOPATRA

## A DRAMATIC POEM

*A chamber with a balcony. Lamps are burning.  
The Egyptian night is seen. Throughout the  
poem CLEOPATRA seated, or pacing the chamber  
in agitation, addresses CHARMIAN, or in an  
absent or rapt manner thinks aloud. She is  
first seen reclining on a couch of lion-skins.  
Two eunuchs, deaf and dumb, fan her cease-  
lessly. Towards the close of the poem the  
dawn breaks.*

CLEOPATRA. How merciless the hush of this  
long night.

I dally on the dark brink of this world

## The Death of Cleopatra

Fooling the moments with a feigning hope,  
Appeasing this dread silence with the words  
Of my own mouth, since words from *him* come  
not.

No news, no news. His love's last promise fails :  
" Alive or dead," he said, " Alive or dead ! "

O could this stillness shudder to a sigh  
Confirming fear that death has ended all.  
How piteous thus to humbly wait on woe  
Like a slave that sickens. Would that these  
dumb things —

That blink and blink with haunting human eyes,  
Could speak like lustier men ; they drowsily  
breathe

Like passive neighbours to unwholesome death ;—  
Ev'n these have blunted sorrows, I suppose,  
That trail their dim lives under the stale skies . . .  
No breath is stirring in the river reeds,  
And all the earth is quiet with old thought :  
Ah, thoughts in me unquiet. O for music

## The Death of Cleopatra

To drown these voices crying in the heart. —  
Can that which hushes Asia still not thee  
Thou clamorous thing ? Is thine a wilder grief  
Than homes in the broad breast of Africa ?  
Silence embalms the shores of all the seas,  
And Nile lies quiet to the leaning moon,  
Lone-musing 'mong her deserts : canst not thou  
Dream, heart, 'mong thine ? Queens in old time  
    have loved,  
And lost their loves, and smiled on crumbling  
    thrones  
Beneath the bright indifference of the stars.  
Great beauties reigned in Memphis' palaces  
And gave love-ardent lips to mummied kings.  
To all an end. The proudest dynasties  
Shrink at the patience of a pyramid.  
I am very weary. (*CHARMIAN enters. The Queen  
    embraces her.*) Ghostly Charmian,  
Did we not die in dim years long ago ?  
This dust hath lengthy dreams. Where are the  
    dancers ?

## The Death of Cleopatra

I read that muteness in thy conscious face :  
Gone, like sly vermin that scent death. Sing,  
girl ;

Make soothing sounds : my senses bleed in me.

CHARMIAN. Lady, grief chokes me, and my  
piteous throat  
Is dry ; yet, if I weep not, that will I  
Do well. What shall I sing to you ?

CLEOPATRA. Words, words,  
Sounds that are steeped in sleep and dimmed with  
death.

CHARMIAN (*chants to an accompaniment on the  
cithara*).

*Sleep, great Queen : to bear thy burden  
Thousands hasten at thy need ;  
Kings with but thy smile for guerdon  
Under dawn and darkness speed.  
Princes gems from Indian fountains  
Bring, and pearls from Araby ;*



## The Death of Cleopatra

*Slaves in Afric's moon-white mountains  
Delve for thee.  
Warriors ward thee. Sleep awhile,  
' Queen of Nile.*

*Cloud enfolded, far from riot,  
Borne on faintly-fanning wings  
Essences out-poured from quiet  
Passive things  
Visit thee in soft seclusion  
Breathing balm and blest illusion.*

*Shapes for soothing without number  
Sue thy thoughts to drowsy themes,  
Stand with eyelids drenched with slumber  
At the cloudy doors of dreams ;  
Zephyrs to thy couch come stealing  
Soft with languors of surcease,  
Faint as shoreward wavelets feeling  
After peace.*

## The Death of Cleopatra

*Fountain-voices feebly falling  
Cool on marble hush the heart ;  
Sleep, each lapsing sense enthralling,  
Calls the drifting soul apart.  
Notes that break not silence brittle  
Summon thee with dulcet breath,  
Breathing, bid thee die the little  
Death.*

*Liquid lisp of loitering waters  
'Neath the dream-clasp of the moon ;  
Downy winds, dim midnight's daughters,  
Through the date-palms croon ;  
Odours steeped in slumbrous passion  
Steal the thoughts that sleep shall fashion  
Soon.*

CLEOPATRA. The sounds are sores : I can but  
think and think.

Thy song is all of the unclouded prime :  
Sleep was of old, and glory was of old,  
And gifts were for the days of smiling power.

## The Death of Cleopatra

Nay mock me not with sweet-commingling  
sounds

Nor with the cloying vanities of words

Tease a sick heart that hungers for dead joy.

No more shall slumber drug this gusty brain,

Nor drown this life in deep forgetfulness.

Ah, the unhallowed antics of dead hours! —

When, doffing state, we took the dear disguise,

And in the streets gave up our hearts to freedom

And shook our hoyden spirits 'neath the stars!

Till life, brushed closely, laid its nature bare,

And mortal challenged mortal, lively true.

How danced the world then! Girl, you have  
seen me pluck

Some gaudy coxcombs by their curl'd beards!

Singe many a perfumed ram, whose high-horned  
power

Had taught desire to spurn impediment,

And laugh aloud. I had great beauty then . . .

(*She produces a phial and toys with it.*)

## The Death of Cleopatra

This is the precious baby of my grief ;  
It lies upon my breast yet draws no milk ;  
It will not wound with scorn, nor turn hard  
eyes

Upon me ever, nor in age forget me.

Look, Charmian, it is thought's remedy :

This at the lips shall let the silence in,  
And shut the eyes of memory with a kiss.

I have breathed splendour as mean lives breathe  
breath,

And in this precious trifle is stored up  
More peace than life hath room for. Yet a  
while

Come closer, girl, for I have loved you well.

You know we women numb our griefs with  
words.

Sweet, let me talk an hour, like some glad child  
That chatters full of its own happy day,

Then to my sleep. I should have gorgeous  
dreams.

## The Death of Cleopatra

CHARMIAN. Live ! O great Queen, die not,  
live, live and reign !

I slept but now, yet, pity me, I slipped,  
O'erwearied, into time beyond these hours ;  
And mighty stirrings filled a moment's dream,  
Then shouts of triumph, and a wild surprise  
Shook our mazed hearts, and brightened all your  
face.

A voice rang out " What news ? " and one cried  
" Well ! "

And then I woke, and hurried, fain to tell —  
But dared not, for I feared you, having slept.—  
O, dreams are prophecies sometimes. — Far off  
There was a noise of armies hurrying ;  
The dun dust muffled their on-speeding feet,  
Their weapons rang upon the leaning night ;  
And riding hosts on camels and great beasts,  
With flashing spears and shields, moon-  
journeying

Under the dark, and bursting 'thwart the dawn,

## The Death of Cleopatra

Paused not but hastened ever toward old Nile. —  
Live for a day — a month — a little year !  
I have often, often trembled at your looks,  
Loving from far, but now I have no fear,  
And pit myself against the power of death  
For love of you : then kill me if you will,  
But heed my pleading.

CLEOPATRA.            Cease, poor, pretty fool.  
I chose one lover from a crowd of kings,  
And kingdoms turned my haters.    None will  
                 heed.

My course is set.    Girl, I am Cleopatra,  
Not less than destiny : my heart was ever  
Tempted to fierce adventure, and enticed  
By the proud faces of august extremes.  
Were life so lovely hitched to Cæsar's whim ?  
To be shown meekly to exultant Rome,  
And doomed before an ogling mob to take  
The temperate insult of Octavia's eyes  
Were favour truly !    Let me writhe in hell

## The Death of Cleopatra

Rather than dip my forehead to that  
woman !

Sooner shall Cheop's pyramid bow down,  
And guardian Sphinx, with gaze inscrutable  
Watching the desert wide toward Nubia,  
Doff all her ancient dignity and lie  
Prone to the scoff of ages ! I have drunk  
Too deeply of this wine of sovranity,  
Too long, close-leagued with power, have felt with  
pride

The starry isolation of a throne  
To walk the fateless paths of impotence.

CHARMIAN. Yet scorn not me — whose love is  
proud as yours,  
Gazing at death. Be kind as you are sad  
For sake of things remembered. "Fool" and  
"poor"

Save that I love you, and unfearfully  
Plead for my love. Yet, as you will it, now  
I'll make a mummy of protesting nature,

## The Death of Cleopatra

And watch, and speak no word, love only and  
listen

The hastening footsteps of unlovely death.

CLEOPATRA. Dear girl, do you remember  
happiness ?

Lean this last time your head against my knee

As in glad days it leaned ere a great love

Exalted me. The Roman's wife forgot

The tender dues to friendship, but affliction

Pricks to remembrance the Egyptian widow.

We have been spendthrifts 'mid the joys of life ;

We have danced, and sung, and supped from  
nectared cups,

And walked in dreams together you and I :

And now we wake. For me that longer sleep,

The dizzy journey, and the darker dream,

And dawns of woe, and days unutterable.

My songs are sung, and never dancing feet

Will gladden me more. But you are young —  
ah young !



## The Death of Cleopatra

And jealousy could sting me to a tear  
And cruel hate were I less enviable. —  
Reach me a mirror — nay do not — I know  
Grief crumples all my visage to a rind,  
And time insults me. . . . Do you remember,  
    child,  
This passion's birth whence leapt the buzz of  
    the world?  
Fondle my sick hand while I tell it o'er  
As mothers tell the names of their dead  
    babes.  
It was a summer's night, the watching stars  
Burned with intenser fire, and each far sound  
Fell like faint music on the listening ear,  
And all of loveliness more lovely seemed  
But sad with sadness of a deep farewell.  
Beneath us dreamed the city, and the bay  
Bore the brave ships, and like a silver shield  
Shone to the moon ; and on the lucent wave  
Antonius lay waiting for the morn,

## The Death of Cleopatra

The sundering morn, that would twixt him  
and me

Invite the severing and embittering seas,  
And that long silence that no words could cross,  
Nor any sign to speak of woe or well.

The day had worn the splendour of his face,  
The night had caught a wonder from his  
name,

And with his words the winds were murmurous ;  
And all the sadness that made kind his eyes  
At parting to my fast remembrance clung,  
And made responsive sadness melt in mine.  
And more than pity yearned to comfort him.

Then, faint with fear, foreboding dreadful  
days

And endless sorrow, I sighed toward him, " Fare-  
well ! "

And hope and love stood at my side and wailed  
Unto an empty life, " Farewell, Farewell ! "  
Then, mightier than staid reason old and chill,

## The Death of Cleopatra

The woman's nature in me proudly rose  
And, with the fearless confidence of love,  
Sent forth its conquering mandate,—and he  
    came,  
He came! and from the great world wrenched  
    his heart  
And gave it to a woman. . . .

CHARMIAN (*sings.*)

### ANTONY'S SONG.

*Who would not give the gift  
And pause 'mid strenuous days  
To cherish dreams and drift  
In his queen's praise?*

*Who would not take his meed  
And yield cross care awhile  
And fairest fortune read  
In his queen's smile?*

## The Death of Cleopatra

*Or for some good to be  
Who would not venture this  
And court calamity  
For his queen's kiss ?*

*Or who is now so high  
He dare not venture higher  
Lest he should lose thereby  
His low desire ?*

*He who would pause for fear  
Plays but the coward's part ;  
Let him not trespass near  
A high heart.*

*I stake — and count the cost —  
My world on this one move.  
I'll deem it nobly lost  
For a queen's love.*

## The Death of Cleopatra

CLEOPATRA. His praise made mean things  
royal. How he loved ! . . .  
So lone and large the night. Ah, passionate  
hours  
That flashed a challenge to the flaming sun  
And flung a splendour 'thwart the fleeting moon,  
When love filled all the gorgeous night with fire,  
When the heart shouted *Marcus* to the brain,  
And the veins tingled to *Antonius* ! —  
He made of time intoxication, touched  
To subtler sweetness all the thrills of life,  
Enlarged the bounds of nature, and with joy  
Startled the world with a rude and rich excess  
Till living was delight and breathing bounty.  
Oh ! I would set his name on deathless lips,  
And cry it to the proud years unconceived ! . . .  
How rare a substance for so mean an end :  
*Antonius* dead ! the sense revolts at it.  
Yet all my being heard a sudden cry  
And sickened on the moment when he fell.

## The Death of Cleopatra

True was the news, most fit, most nobly true,  
Through him that bore it did I strike to dust —  
Yet kissed his mouth when dying, I felt so proud.

CHARMIAN. Oh trust it not. Antonius may  
live.

How many in the bright imperious years  
Have fluttered mothlike toward your perilous  
face

With wildered hearts to wonder and to die !  
And there are many high souls on this earth  
That wait a proud love's bidding.

CLEOPATRA.                      There you touch  
A place too raw. Enough of that!— enough.  
My last kiss clings unto a dead man's lips  
For ever. I am ashes of love's fire.  
What fool would strain beneath a weight of lies  
To flout or flatter this most hapless me  
Down toppling into ruin. He is dead,  
Else the dumb land had surged in instant song,  
Winds fluted victory. He is dead — not less,

## The Death of Cleopatra

For less were failure. . . I am haunted, girl,  
By the fierce sorrow in that courier's eyes :  
His passionate speed like insult angered me,  
He stank of sweat, and I was wrath with news  
So little to my liking, — so he died —  
But that there was upon those twitching lips —  
Portentous silence straining toward a sound  
And dying speechless, that o'er-burthens thinking :  
Some last plea, haply, some lorn, wild farewell  
Of fond and desperate love, torn with a pain  
Of dying gasps from him that swore to send it. . .  
Words — phantoms of weird sorrows — ghostly  
words —

Baffled and vain — strain toward me — strain and  
die. . .

I am o'erwrought with fears I know not whence,  
And sicken with regrets for pangs unknown.—

*(She appeals to the night sky.)*

If there be powers that in this secret world  
Move and remember and have heed of men,

## The Death of Cleopatra

Oh touch me from the dark if the dead live !  
And if the living languish speak to me ! —  
Out of the eerie silence speak ! . . . (*She speaks  
intensely with a fixed stare.*) Ah woe —  
Strange woe comes round me like a sudden  
cloud —

Woe — woe quiescent in a blurr of pain —  
A horror hurries to my rocking spirit, —  
And piteous hands deep in some dread unseen  
Reach toward me, and my brain delirious reels —  
And a face glimmers dim and far — *his* face —  
And like a dying wind, far off, a cry ; —  
Hold me ! — I speed through darkness — I am  
faint —

Tangled in tortured air — I see, I see  
A widely swaying battle — the wild cries  
Ring in my ears ; — comes, *Cæsar* ! down a wave,  
And thunderous throats respond, *Antonius* ! —  
The air is hot with tempest — I smell blood —  
Proudly I flash, I lighten toward my lord —



## The Death of Cleopatra

Red horror smears his cheek, and from his hands  
Wet gore drips, drips whene'er his sword bites —

See !

He fronts the shock and crimsoning crash of war,  
And counts his wounds as kisses.—Fierce as Mars  
He whets his fury on the reeling welter —

His steps are on the dead — I see, I hear  
The perilous breach, the passionate rallying cry,  
The ringing onrush, and the red recoil,

The guttural gurgle of foot-strangled men —

And, raging toward the heights, Antonius,  
His proud face, blanchèd as a sea-bird's wing

Dipped in a storm, potent and pitiless —

Death sits upon his wheeling arm and laughs —

His bright blade whistles home. — He strives  
alone —

Loud Legions press him round — impervious  
power

Waits his wild coming with a wall of spears —

He heeds it not, but, drawing harder breath,

## The Death of Cleopatra

He flings Fate's flaunted insult in his face  
And grandly passes, bearing terrors down,  
On to engulfing doom. And with a groan,  
His life's tempestuous demon shuddering forth,  
He hurls his battered bulk on death — and falls,  
He falls ! — my love — my world — Antonius ! —  
*Mine* ! — mine, blanched watcher with brows  
saturnine,

That standest on the haughtiest tower of Rome  
Straining thy vision vain toward Africa ! —  
Mine in his bounding wealth of passionate life,  
And in the stern magnificence of his death,  
And in the impassionate silence of his dust —  
mine ! . . .

( *She stands dazed, feeling the air, as though  
issuing from a trance. She speaks quietly.* )

Now am I ripe for death. Pity not me,  
For I am prouder than the stars of heaven. —  
Yet was there something somewhere, wild with  
grief,

## The Death of Cleopatra

That cried to me for mercy. It was strange . . .  
Vain is the pain, vain is the ecstasy :  
Drab time returns, void love, and endless loss . . .  
Be gentle, Charmian, I was once a queen ;  
Be patient with me, very soon I die.

CHARMIAN. Have I not loved you through the  
years ? Ah, still  
Wound my long love, and prove it ; spare me not.  
Yet, lo, your eyes are distant with your heart ;  
Your ears strain for the footsteps of the dead,  
For love-remembered greetings, and your face,  
Veiled like your spirit in a mist of pain,  
Peers forth on seas of sorrow, O my queen.

CLEOPATRA (*absently*). This is the curse of  
very woman, — 'tis  
To love through all, yea to be loved in all,  
To suffer all for love's sake cheerfully,  
To love with passion unto bitter grief,  
And yet to fail by nature, not by will,

## The Death of Cleopatra

When terrors threaten duties. So I failed —  
Yea fled in furious fear and fiery shame,  
While sea to sky shouted my infamy,  
Before a thousand ships at Actium! —  
Thereby he fell : and yet he slew me not —  
Nay wounded me with love the more for this —  
That I was more the woman . . . O treacherous  
day !

That bleeds in time, and blushes in the heart,  
Whose bastard hours, embraced by passionate  
fears,

Bore all our sorrows. O most heavy day ! —  
'Twas on a laughing sea, the joyous waves  
Kissed all our prows, and flattered us with  
foam.

Our punctual oars plashed in the yielding deep,  
And rose like wings of silver to the sun ;  
As in a dream I saw it ; then the crash  
As with a bold embrace we clasped the foe,  
And with convulsions dangerous swung free,

## The Death of Cleopatra

And cursed, and passed, and closed again with  
ire.

Across my brain the furious faces surged,  
Rude-rocked 'twixt reeling clouds and reeling  
seas.

Shrill shrieks for vengeance rode the rising wind,  
And death with crimson footsteps hissing came ;  
And at the rageful cries the roused deep  
In monstrous anger, bubbling all with blood,  
Lashed his gored flanks, and in his steaming  
maw

Entombed both ships and men : then all of  
time

Shrank to a moment wherein madness blazed  
A fearful light in an extinguished world.

Burn, memory, be my joy and torture me ! . . .

Most royal love, that leaned in silence down

And made remorse eternal with a kiss.

My Roman, — my life's rex, — my mightier I, —

My passionate glass and kingly complement, —

## The Death of Cleopatra

My nature's twin and darling ! — made for me ! —  
Who caused dim days to glow with lustrous deeds  
That I but dared to dream of. We have swung  
Upon the very crest of time, and shared  
The laughter of the lords of fate : but now  
Thou art gone from me, and the gods are mute ;  
And I that was so lofty in the world  
Am cast low down, and humbled before all,  
And am through grief no longer beautiful.  
Antoni<sup>us</sup>, where, where are thy gods and  
mine ? . . .

CHARMIAN (*chants to a plaintive accompaniment*).

*A Queen reigned in a proud land  
By lotused Nile ;  
And Kings from far did honoured stand  
In the Queen's smile.  
Her name was rich through the wide west :  
And the hot south  
Moaned for love of a mooned breast  
And a Queen's mouth.*

## The Death of Cleopatra

*Before her face might no dog stir.  
Great armies shrank because of her.*

*A lone Queen in a lorn land  
By weary Nile ;  
And beggars turn from the Queen's hand  
And the Queen's smile.*

*One weakling woman weeps in vain  
Her heart's drouth,  
And heeds the words that move with pain  
The Queen's mouth.*

*No dog will at her bidding stir,  
And glory hath deserted her.*

CLEOPATRA. Ah, Charmian, our dreams indeed  
are past :

We have drunk up the sweetness of the night ;  
The spacious noontide is an empty cup,  
And all the wells of happiness are dry,  
And glory is a glimmer far away

## The Death of Cleopatra

Tinging the summits of remembrance. Yea,  
We have out-travelled fortune, child : and now,  
All splendour past, and joy for ever gone,  
We well may drop life's leavings to the dust  
With dignity, and, proudly passing, cease  
Crowned at the heart. Hand me my jewels,  
girl, —

Quick, through far silence steals th' unfriendly  
day,

For see, across the blank and boundless sand  
Pale yonder sets the immemorial moon,  
The moon that beamed on Pharaohs, and that  
silvered

The reeds and lotus at the lips of Thebes.  
My jewels, haste ! I go to meet my lord. . . .

*( She takes and fondles the jewels. )*

From what dense night came this resplendent  
noon ?

This blaze of brightness shall outdazzle time



## The Death of Cleopatra

And lighten on the bosoms of strange queens  
When men shall say of me in those large years,  
“She was a queen who loved Antonius :  
She perished long ago.” Yet 'tis but stone.  
How all things mock us underneath the sun !  
The humble scarab in a sardonyx  
Outlives the gaudy fame of emperors.  
A priceless stone — love's gift . . . Ah this ! . . .  
and this !

Most harsh refulgence ! glitter uncharitable !  
Each gleam like some swift dagger stabs, and  
brings

A gushing memory home ! Ah stony hearts,  
And fiery glances, flung from pitiless eyes,  
Mocking imperial sorrow ! Antonius,  
Thy gifts forget their giver's tenderness . . .  
This diamond was the pride of a king's crown,  
But it hath caught a splendour from the love  
Of Antonius, — this to my brow to blaze  
The proud memorial of his earliest kiss.

## The Death of Cleopatra

That flaming reptile coil about my arm,  
Yea let it press and pain my tender flesh,  
He gave it with a smile, O, it hath touched  
The hand of Antonius ! About me clasp  
This curious zone and phantasy of gold  
With heads of monsters graven and eyed with  
gems, —

A merchant sold it to my lord, it came  
From happy islands toward the sunset where  
Soft summer seas of sapphire lisp and croon  
In stilly bays that hold a stiller heaven —  
Whose calm no prow hath broken, and whose  
peace,

Unraped by rude and boisterous mariners,  
Is virgin from the world's birth. Once he said  
We twain should sail to those faint, happy,  
shores,

And float moon-kist upon the silent sea,  
And spread a tale of wonder through the west . . .  
Nay tighter, Charmian, tighter till it hurts !

## The Death of Cleopatra

Have I not felt the thews and thongs of love,  
And dumbly lain in sweetest torture captive  
In Marcus' brave embraces? O, tighter yet!  
Till this dumb thing shall feign an ecstasy  
And hold me with the arms of Antonius —  
Antonius . . . Girl, look I fit for death?  
And is my bearing royal? . . . Sing to me.

CHARMIAN.

*She moves in jewelled sheen  
To death with lonely pride;  
The splendour that hath been  
Before her face hath died.  
Down from the palace of her dreams serene  
Steps the proud bride  
Into thy arms, O Death, — thou bitter lover.  
With gems and raiment rich cover her, cover.*

*All things that burn and flame,  
Forces that fashion  
Doom, and delight, and blame,*

## The Death of Cleopatra

*Peril, and passion,*

*One with her will did wait :*

*In her face fate. . . .*

CLEOPATRA. Pass me the mirror. (*She looks.*)

Ah, no more ! no more !

I reigned in time : Nile will remember me.

A dream my glory. I am very old . . .

Lo, far away are stirrings of the dawn :

The air breathes chilly, and expectant nature

Waits as one waits who loves. A fiery gleam

Broadens and gathers beauty. Light grows  
large

In Persia, and th' importunate nightingale

In dewy valleys of the wakening rose

Outsings the paling patience of the stars.

Open the lattice to the breathing south :

See with what tender joy the fingering dawn

Touches the bosom of the sinuous Nile.

The slaves along the rice-fields light their  
fires,

## The Death of Cleopatra

The women wander crooning to the wells,  
And Karnak with an opulence of dreams  
Shakes in the wave. No staring day for me  
To prove my bleeding woe with tongues and eyes.

*(She holds the poison phial and  
looks at it.)*

CHARMIAN. Forbear. O haste not to the utter  
dark.

There come not any tidings from the earth,  
Nor stirring morn, nor noontide's amplitude,  
No subtle whispers of the summer night  
Beneath the scented silence and the stars.  
There love's sweet arguments are muted all,  
And lips meet never ; but the busy worm  
Unwearied works in horrid gloom, and all  
Is taint and cold : dear love, and queen, for-  
bear ! —

Your children —

CLEOPATRA. Ah ! you hurt me ! I have  
thought.

## The Death of Cleopatra

Stay! else, like some struck lioness with her  
whelps,

I claw this air in frenzy! I have thought.  
My death will buy some pity for my children  
Even from Cæsar, for proud emperors grieve  
When prouder queens die quickly. All is gone.—  
I dare not think! — I dare not think! — Away! —

*(She pushes CHARMIAN from her.)*

Nay, come, child, I am tender-cruel now.—  
Yet save my heart from thinking lest I palter.  
Cease! cease! praise not joys dead, nor unto  
loss

Add madness. Feign thy kindness harsh and  
make

Remembrance brutal. Cumber me with blame  
And keep me fierce in sorrow — that my heart  
May outstep nature and be peer to fate . . .

I am too proud to perish. What is known  
I heed not; what is unknown I will prove  
And test it if life be. Cease. I am fixed.

## The Death of Cleopatra

Come, now I'll kiss thee though thou art no male,  
And savourless to kiss after those sweets.

CHARMIAN. *(Presents a casket in which is a  
deadly adder.)*

Death summoned thus comes quickly, so they  
say.

CLEOPATRA. What mischief now, puss? It is  
late, sweet sport,  
To tickle time. — Pah! see, it squirms! — Away!  
I hate all crawling things.—Strangle the beast.

*(CHARMIAN with one hand secretes the creature on  
her person, and flings away the casket with  
the other hand.)*

The poison. See, I'll with my Roman mate  
In some bright sphere or rot a queen in this.

*(With a smile she pours the poison  
into a chalice.)*

Ah! this will keep me royal to the last:  
There is no hate in it, it will not storm

## The Death of Cleopatra

The heart with violence, nor crumple up  
With envy the smooth brightness of the cheek.  
With this I challenge death, and spiteful fate  
Trick at the moment of her triumph. Soon  
This draught will make me dense as a dull  
clod,

Or wiser than all grave philosophers  
That e'er nosed tablets, or sucked milky  
truth

At Alexandrian nipples . . . Winking death, —  
See how it sparkles ! Girl, there's laughter in it !  
Life is a game, maybe, and death a jest,  
A royal game, a royal jest, and then,  
These childish humours all put by, at last  
To weightier business in some world to be.  
What ! weep you, child ? Why, look you, I can  
laugh ! —

Laugh and an end ! This wipes all sorrows out,  
Untwists the tangled threads of thought, and  
makes



## The Death of Cleopatra

Life's complicated meaning plain. All paths  
Lead to one shadowy doorway late or soon.

(CHARMIAN *suddenly rising, strains at attention.*)

CHARMIAN. Hark! hark! . . . I hear the beat  
of hastening hooves

Far out o'er the dumb earth . . .

CLEOPATRA. I hear nought . . .

CHARMIAN. Hark! . . .

Nearer, and nearer, as though one speeds for  
home

Rich at the heart! (*She goes to the balcony and  
looks forth.*)

CLEOPATRA. Hope fools thee: thou art  
young.

My ears are dead to all most welcome sounds  
On this side time.

CHARMIAN. The guards are all alert,  
With faces set they grip their gleaming spears,  
And watch like lions roused . . . It faints . . .  
It fails . . .

## The Death of Cleopatra

Alas, great queen.

CLEOPATRA.           Some lover to his love  
By Cydnus or Canobus stilly stream,  
Angry with time, sped past, straining toward joy.  
I drink.

CHARMIAN.           O life! are there no gods by  
                          Nilus? —

Isis, great mother, queen of the high heaven,  
Hearken! — Osiris! — Is there none to hear?

CLEOPATRA.   None. Call now on that god of  
                          India  
Your Ænobarbus told of.

CHARMIAN.           *He died! He died!*

CLEOPATRA.   More god hereafter, haply, 'yond  
                          the taste  
Of time and death. He passed as I pass now.  
The gods are life's excess. We make the gods  
By living and by dying. Greatly go.

(CHARMIAN *falls at CLEOPATRA'S feet, and embraces her.*)

## The Death of Cleopatra

CHARMIAN. Cleopatra ! my Cleopatra whom I  
have loved !

CLEOPATRA. Pule not ; nor vex with wailing  
this high peace.

Tie up thy tongue ; stuff thy frail mouth with  
silence,

Else will I, dying, hate thee. (*She lifts the  
chalice.*) To my love. (*She drains it.*)

See, thus I leap this little lump of earth,  
And soar on wings from Cæsars ! . . . Charmian,  
Now toward the great enigma and the dumb  
dark

I pass. There haply footsteps never come,  
Nor beauty wandering, nor lips that love,  
Nor hate, nor conquest, nor wild ecstasy,  
Nor any voice at midnight or at morn :  
Yet am I all impenitent to die,  
To brave whate'er there be, despairing not  
To reach *him* and the gods. (*A distant tumult is  
heard.*) Hark ! the wolves bark.

## The Death of Cleopatra

Love enters not so loudly. This is well.  
I know my guards die grandly : they are brave . .  
I would not want for beauty : bid them not  
Lay me within the grim sarcophagus  
And leave me lonely 'mid the chill of tombs ;  
But strew me where my dust shall flame in  
    flowers  
And burn a carmine glory toward the sun ;  
Or let me mingle with the curling wave  
And roll for ever with the tidal sea  
And with the tempest triumph, till the years  
Through all their glittering cycles shall have run,  
Till like a meteor streaming down the night  
I burning speed home to Antonius . . .  
Sing! sing! — I hear life's moments dropping  
    from me. —  
O, for the clash of cymbals! the whirl of the  
    dance! . . .  
(CHARMIAN *attempts to sing, but the sounds sob*  
    *in her throat.*)

## The Death of Cleopatra

*(In the growing tumult the clash of weapons  
heard.)*

Thy songs have all turned sorrows. Sing no  
more . . .

Hark! . . . This long silence shudders into  
song. —

My name came up the night in a dying cry . . .  
Child, hold my hand : I grow so chill and lone —  
I, who was Cleopatra . . . From the tombs  
So many faces turn toward them that die.  
Unto the weeping progeny of joy  
May them that hate show mercy — *his* and mine ;  
Lo, I am like the dying mother of lambs  
Bleating 'mong lions. Ah the natural blood  
Cries in me with a great and yearning  
cry !

Where is that son of Cæsar's, my sad son,  
Whom I have never loved ? . . .

*(The tumult approaches.)* Hark ! hark ! . . .

What news ? . . .

## The Death of Cleopatra

The light swims, and the earth wheels from me,  
and all

Things here grow vague. The mists are  
thickening down ;

The air is clotted, and my body full

Of wavering voices and the rage of death . . .

The Roman wolves are barking in the night ; —

And in my heart the echo of a cry —

Out in the night, over the dark in vain.

*(The tumult grows gradually more violent.)*

They come. I'll look my best for this proud  
once.

*(CÆSAR'S emissaries burst in, and stand. One  
advances. CLEOPATRA with great effort  
and self-control.)*

What would ye, rabble, with impertinent tongues

Ruffling my rest ? Am I so prone indeed

That all the pimps of time impetuously

May spit at me ? Hence ! to flushed Cæsar say

His whelps had earned their whipping had I lived

## The Death of Cleopatra

A brave while longer, but importunate death  
Worries my vitals.

MESSENGER. By great Cæsar's mercy,  
Lady, Antonius lives. He rests below  
Death-smitten by your guards. They knew him  
not.

His wounds had changed him greatly. Ere  
he fell

He cried on you for mercy —

CLEOPATRA (*faintly.*) Ah. I heard.  
Tease not, faint fool. — For mercy . . . nay for  
love.

He cried too late . . . Life is too full at last . . .  
Upon sensations have I freely fed,  
And gathered ecstasies with both my hands  
Till the heart ached with sweetness. — Like a  
flame

I pass, to follow joy among the stars . . .  
Antonius! . . . Antonius! . . . So I choose.

(*She stretches forth her hands as if in welcome*

## The Death of Cleopatra

*towards the entrance of the chamber, and dies. First messenger goes out quickly. The eunuchs fling themselves prostrate, and remain so. A distant voice is heard crying: "Room for ANTONIUS." CHARMIAN, kneeling, kisses the dead queen's lips.)*

CHARMIAN. I cannot hear. Thy words are far away.

Oh thou art gathered to the shadows now  
And speakest to the dead beyond the years.

*( She pinches the reptile hidden at her breast. )*

Most lonely one. Love, I will follow soon,  
Seeking thy needs with service, — follow —  
follow

Where thy all-lonely feet step through the  
dark,

And thy Greek face, so bitter-beautiful,  
Is set, pain-proud, toward perils evermore.

*( Re-enter MESSENGER. )*



## The Death of Cleopatra

MESSENGER. Lady, Antonius lives.

CHARMIAN. What's that to me?

My love is dead. Oh let Antonius rot.

MESSENGER. Listen, he comes.

(*Voice without.*)

VOICE. Room for Antonius.

CHARMIAN. Sweet company. Then I may  
hurry now.

This earth grows empty . . . (*Others enter.*)

Lo, you have come through terror and through  
blood

To this great peace. With tongues that pity  
bleed

Commend my mistress to Augustus Cæsar.

Behold her laid. Is she not wonderful?

Bear her brave body to the utmost deep,

And give it to the waves and the storm-winds;

Or build a pyre high in a fruitful land

And scatter her bright ashes to the flowers:

It was her will. The dead plead well. Obey her.

## The Death of Cleopatra

*( She plucks the adder out of her breast and  
flings it from her. )*

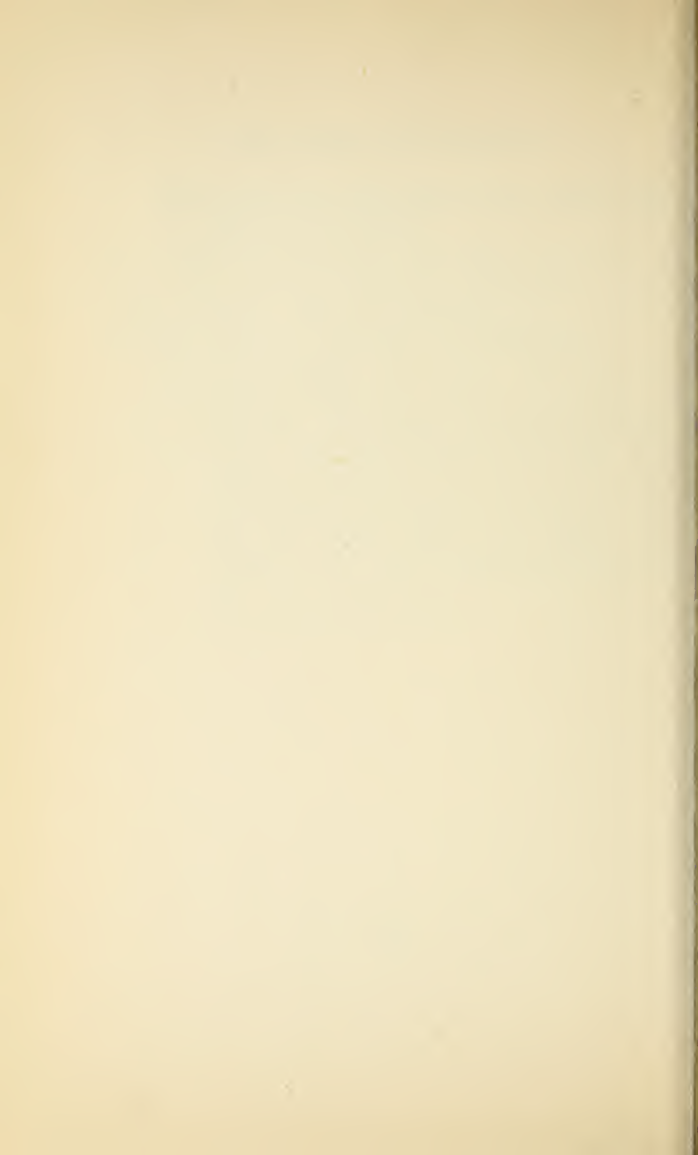
Out, wilful wanton, life's good folly's past . . .

I had a dream — see, it is ended all —

A dream in time — its name was Cleopatra.

*( She falls dizzily and dying. ANTONIUS is  
borne in. They place him before the dead  
queen. He gazes fixedly at her face, and  
with an effort rises to his feet, and, call-  
ing her name, falls dead before her.  
Soldiers and others crowd in and gaze.  
The day is breaking. )*





## HOW PIERO CAPPONI OF FLOR- ENCE DEFIED CHARLES VIII. OF FRANCE

Sat King Charles in royal state  
And in pride  
With his gold-brocaded nobles importunate,  
elate,  
At his side.  
Facing the cold King's abhorrence  
Stood the bravest men of Florence  
Steady-eyed.  
Spake the King, "To this your city  
Am I come in martial raiment  
Not to spin a lengthy ditty  
But to take a promised payment."  
Answered Piero Capponi,  
Spare and breezy, bronzed and bony,

## Piero Capponi

"Sire, we come to you to-day  
Not to pander nor to pray,  
Not to treat you as a donor,  
    We are debtors to your might,  
And we come to pay in honour  
    What our reason says is right."

Then read Cardinal St. Malo at his master's gracious pleasure  
All the items to the debit of the city's golden treasure :

And a jest aside he threw  
To amuse the royal leisure,  
    And withdrew.  
Outspoke Piero the strong,  
"Sire, this tale is somewhat long  
    And no answer to our quest ;  
Sauce to fowl, and wine to song,  
    Novelty best helps a jest.  
Wit must furbish up his store,  
We have heard this joke before."

## Piero Capponi

Flushed the King with rosy hate,  
And his nobles frownded irate

At his side.

Cried King Charles, "What! ye deny me,  
Dogs, my dues, and here defy me?"

And they faced the Frank's abhorrence  
For the name and fame of Florence

And defied.

Spake Piero Capponi

Sternly staunch, and bronzed, and bony,

"Since your wit is sere and yellow,

And your honour folly's fellow,

With the voice of our fair city hear me  
speak :

We are neither churls nor weak,

Neither slaves,

And we front you eye to eye ;

We have wrung our rights from tyrants, we  
will hold them till we lie

In our graves ! "

## Piero Capponi

As the lightning's livid flash,  
Splits the darkness ere the crash,  
Charles the King in throttling anger  
Leapt, abhorring and abhorred,  
Leapt, and lightened ere he roared,  
While his marshals made a clangour  
For the glory of their lord.  
Stepped Capponi from his fellows, and his sword  
was at his hand,  
Grim and grand.  
Shrieked rude Majesty with rage,  
"Ye shall sign this written page!  
Bid the trumpets cry Advance  
To the pike and to the lance,  
We will spur these fowls of Florence in a fashion  
known to France!"  
Spake roused spokesman Piero like a smitten  
lion then,  
"We shall prove to thee, Barbarian, we are men!"



## Piero Capponi

And we pass with honour hence

From thy sounding insolence.

Ye have heard our terms before :

Not a single florin more

Till ye wring it from our hearts' blood ! See,  
before thee in this place

Shall thy proffered royal insult straight redound  
to thy disgrace,

For I take this script and tear it in defiance  
in thy face !”

Oaths from muffled murmurs sprang,

Swords 'gainst armour shrilly sang,

Proudly o'er the tumult rising clear Capponi's  
words outrang,

“ Haste your hirelings, — we shall meet them !

We have heroes : honour tells !

We will answer to this bluster with a blast  
that ye shall hear !

Now our glory's noon is near :

Freedom's notes are tyrants knells :

## Piero Capponi

We shall greet you with a cheer  
And the challenge of our bells ! ”  
Round he flung him. On the floor  
Lay the red and royal seal,  
And he crushed it 'neath his heel,  
And he strode, this lion leal,  
To the door.  
Like a feverish fool of fate,  
Cowed before a kinglier hate,  
The King sate.  
Smiling, soothing, fawning near  
Sued the Cardinal St. Malo in his ear  
With slippery tongue, all guile,  
“ Sire, have patience for a while ;  
Let this thorny discord drop :  
Our diplomacy designs  
That we reap a splendid crop  
From these flighty Florentines.”  
And he bowed supinely low.  
Then he turned to Piero,

## Piero Capponi

Cooing, "Signor, wherefore go?"

And he smiled with cautious glee,

Feigned indifference cunningly,

And the courtiers took the cue,

Smiled and cooed all in a row —

But their hate showed grinning  
through —

And their master smirked also.

With a feint of dignity

Crowed the King: "Hence: let it be.

But our royal flag shall fly

From your turrets and your towers

In the sight of every eye,

So the glory shall be ours."

Outspoke Piero Capponi and Valori and the  
rest,

"We shall recommend to Florence what at  
heart we think is best."

## Piero Capponi

In the city on the morrow wherever wind would  
    blow,  
From palazzo, in piazza, on the Ponte  
    Vecchio,  
From all the city walls and towers, on pinnacle  
    and lance,  
Blew by order of the Signory the royal flag  
    of France; —  
And ever proud above it, plain for every eye  
    to see,  
Flew the fearless, darling flag of Liberty.

## FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

In the red days of travail we wept, we were  
soldiers and human ;

Wide misery drenched us, and drowned the hale  
hope of each true man.

Heaven pitied our perils and pangs, for the heart  
of a woman

Heard the death-bark of doom.

She came in the night of our grief with God's  
patience upon her ;

She paced through our tents 'mid our tears, with  
His peace did He don her ;

Dying men looking up gave her "Hail !" and  
white death gave her honour

In the reek and the gloom.

## Florence Nightingale

The light of her lamp was as heaven when pain's  
clouds are departed ;  
The touch of her hand was as bliss when the  
agony started ;  
Like a mother's her wonderful ways, when the  
death-whisper smarted,  
To the child of her womb.

Gaunt and ghastly were we as dead men whom  
battle had broken ;  
Our darlings were nought, nor our days, for the  
fiend's mouth had spoken ;  
And she came into hell trailing hope, sad Heav'n's  
sole gleaming token  
At the mouth of the tomb.

Her voice was the lips of his love to the lad  
death was thralling,  
Like the sweet noise of waters at night in his  
homeland faint falling

## Florence Nightingale

When the meads lay dew-wet to the moon and  
the landrails were calling  
By the star-lighted comb.

Her glance was the light from fond days that  
should ne'er know returning,  
Whose hopes were all ground into ashes for  
time's gusty spurning :  
Like a sunset at love-time her look to frail  
dreamers still yearning  
For love's withered bloom.

Like a spirit she paced the long dark, wan and  
worn with our weeping ;  
Like a flame amid smoke was her form 'mid the  
hush of our sleeping —  
While the plains from Scutari grew grim, and the  
lean dawn 'gan creeping  
Blood-red to its bloom.

## Florence Nightingale

She nursed us for love, in the names of our  
mothers and daughters,  
When the waves of our woe raged around  
whipped of hatred that slaughters;  
And she moved with the footsteps of Christ when  
He walked on the waters  
In Galilee's gloom.

We may weep for her now who so long wept our  
brave hope's downcasting;  
Mute heroine, hiding her tears; she was faint  
with love's fasting:  
She shall nurse in the white wards of God in His  
world everlasting  
Where the culverins boom.



## TO A HOMELESS MOUSE

Wee mortal with the merry eyes  
And comely coat of homely gray,  
Shame on a hasty enterprise  
That brings to thee this sorry day ;  
I grieve to know a scheme of mine  
Disaster spells to thee and thine.

Oft in the summer gone have I  
Beheld thee like a sportive sprite,  
In turn elusive, pert, and shy,  
Dart here and there as quick as light :  
Indeed, fond thing, thou wert to me  
The pet of Fancy's progeny.

## To a Homeless Mouse

I learnt the language of thy glance,  
Thy laughing "Catch me if you can!"—  
And truly many a merry dance  
We had together, mouse and man,  
When, prince of mischief's prodigies,  
I found thee 'mong my early peas.

And twice at least I captured thee :  
And oh the flutter in thy skin !  
I warned thee, Mousie, solemnly  
That stealing was a serious sin :  
Ah, many mice when pain seemed near  
Have feigned the penitential tear.

Soon, soon from out a safe retreat  
Two eyes peeped up in merriment,  
And, making impudence complete,  
A tiny nose impertinent ;  
The pose said plain : " I much prefer  
Your green peas to your sermons, sir ! "

## To a Homeless Mouse

I loved thee, thing of twinkling joy,  
Wee sprite of mischief and of wit —  
With which my fancy oft would toy  
Till thou thyself didst seem to flit  
Before me like a lively thought  
Some fay with airy laugh had brought !

And now 'tis I that bring thee pain,  
Uproot thy home, annul thy toil,  
And scatter to the wind and rain  
Thy little hoard of treasured spoil,—  
Housed with such pride and frugal care  
'Gainst cruel times both bleak and bare.

In bitter days that are to be  
Will hunger pinch thy tiny breast ?  
And icy-cold adversity  
Remind thee of thy cosy nest,  
Poor homeless one, 'mid winter's snows,  
Whipped by each bullying wind that blows ?

## To a Homeless Mouse

Thou wert a thing of jocund birth,  
A sunny-hearted humourist,  
A claimant, too, to graver worth,  
Thou diligent economist,  
That without hope, with treasures flown,  
Art homeless now, with grief alone.

Alas that this impetuous hand  
Hath wrought the ruin of thy joy.  
With hope we do the heart's command  
And with the deed fond hope destroy,  
And show at last, by action proved,  
Sad wrongers of the lives we loved.

Poor thrifty thing, a common fate  
Pursues us all that breathe below ;  
On worth unkindly want doth wait,  
And wisdom's foresight thwarts not woe ;  
And suffering falls, we know not whence,  
On folly and on innocence.

## THE DREAM

### A POEM FOR WORDSWORTHIANS

Drenched was the vale ; on every hand  
The brooks came down with froth and din  
In Wordsworth's mist-veiled mountain-land  
I sheltered at an inn.

And cosy was the homely hearth ;  
And eerily a plaintive wind  
Soughed in the neighbouring apple-garth  
And soothed my drowsy mind.

Softly as phantom from a shroud  
Came one, a piteous sight to see,  
His swollen shanks proclaimed aloud  
His name — 'twas Simon Lee.

## The Dream

“ Poor dropsical old Simon, still  
    You toddle on with bones awry ? ”  
He moaned, “ ’Tis Mr. Wordsworth’s will ;  
    Oh, gladly would I die.”

Then others tumbling up behind,  
    Thieves, beggars, gipsies, vagrants free  
As air came in from wet and wind,  
    A motley company.

“ Crone, who are you ? Why, how you quake !  
    This lad in blankets shivering still,  
Who’s he ? ” “ Sir, I am Goody Blake,  
    And he is Harry Gill.”

“ And who are you, my moon-struck joy ?  
    Poor, witless, wandering Ninny-Nonny ? ”  
“ Me ? O me’s called ‘ The Idiot Boy,’  
    But Betty calls me Johnny.”

## The Dream

Peeped up at me a pert wee maid,  
    Persisting, "Master, we are seven."  
"A woman's argument," I said,  
    And wished her home in Heaven.

With primrose in his button-hole  
    Tripped he whose name a child might tell;  
Salvation paunched the pigmy soul  
    Of potter Peter Bell.

Unwashed, unshorn, unkempt crawled one  
    Who, dipping toward the ground his brow,  
Sighed low, "The leeches all are gone,  
    I seek for tadpoles now."

Then all at once this tattered crew  
    With petty griefs and puny crimes,  
All madly mingling, gaped, and flew  
    To join those "crazy chimes,"

## The Dream

And vanished. Then through my repose  
With solemn face, went bustling by  
A serious man with copious nose,  
Chasing a butterfly.

I laughed, and straight came over him  
A bardic look most stern, most wise.  
Quipped I, "Are you that Mr. Prim  
Who saddened Paradise?" —

"For humour once, they say, was sweet  
To Heaven;" but then a frenzy sudden  
Seized him: he wrote at fever heat  
A sonnet on the Duddon.—

I left before the sheet was marred.  
Just ere the doors of dream did close  
I saw that imp, Puck, pulling hard  
At Mr. Wordsworth's nose.



## WORDSWORTH IN ELYSIUM

(ON BEING PUBLICLY REPROVED BY A WORDSWORTHIAN OF HEADINGLEY FOR THE FOREGOING VERSES)

*(A slope in Elysium, Wordsworth and Burns together. Charles Lamb and other hilarious spirits in the vicinity. Wordsworth speaks.)*

List ye, friends, a cuckoo's calling, calling far in  
Headingley !

(Robin, brim another bumper with that Royal  
Hippocrene !)

“Cuckoo, cuckoo.”—In the green

Calling far in Headingley ! . . .

We have done with time and teen

You and I, Rob ;

## Wordsworth in Elysium

And we watch life's misty scene

Drifting by.— Rob !

O, a shiver seizes me,

Isled amid felicity,

When I drink, for I think

How I nearly missed the goal,

Lost my everlasting soul

And this jolly company

By an over-moral prim propriety.

Blithe Robin, while you sip the wine,

Just hear this random scrawl of mine ;

Bard of the land of cakes and thistles,

Whose multitudinous epistles,

Indited mostly to the ladies,

Have plaudits wrung from Heaven and  
Hades,

Heed while I tickle into glee

A certain Mr. Thingummy,

Who, solemn man, Wordsworthian-wise,

Smells fun, then closes both his eyes.

## Wordsworth in Elysium

*(Wordsworth reads.)*

c/o Mr. Robert Burns,

Proprietor of the Tam o'Shanter,

Elysium.

Sunday morning.

Dear Sir,—You'll doubtless be astonished  
To be informally admonished  
By him who wrote the "Ode to Duty"  
And other things of sober beauty.  
But truly, Sir, a smile is best  
When rhyming rascals for a jest  
Do prickle us with rhythmic thorns,  
And step on our poetic corns.  
My kindling, sympathetic Friend,  
Be not too hasty, but suspend  
Swift judgment, for this flutter shows  
Thy wit hath but a faulty nose —  
Which, poking in this little matter,  
Doth make a mess of all the platter.

## Wordsworth in Elysium

Sir, when we come to think of it  
There's room for reverence and for wit  
In all that mortal man hath made —  
Man, shade enamoured of a shade.  
Impervious champion, O ! beware  
Of over-seriousness ; nor share  
With staid professors, paunched with prose,  
A prim and philosophic pose, —  
For affectation doth reject  
Fine honesty. In this respect  
I too have sinned : I turned my face  
From laughter's genial dwelling-place,  
Till Nature grew the counterpart  
Of the proud Ego in my heart.  
But thanks to that sane Power that brings  
Some goodness out of faulty things,  
And 'yond our aims an end discerns,  
I hobnob here with Robert Burns,  
And with the rest of that blithe crew  
Whose laughter whipped the world, o'er-  
threw

## Wordsworth in Elysium

The poser's kingdom and set free  
The prisoned muse of comedy.  
Staid Friend, it is no phantom rumour  
That sinners may be saved by humour,—  
O ! if a soul be thine, then fear,  
Turn not thy back on wit as I did  
Who stood ashamed and shivering here,  
By the eternal jesters chided,  
What time I entered, mild and mum,  
These portals of Elysium.  
'Tis sad to see one dumbly plod  
Through dismal days denied a god ;  
More sad to see one fume and fuss  
Still dead to the ridiculous.  
Though faiths by factions be adored,  
Friend, humour too is of the Lord,  
And guides a dizzy zeal aright  
That else grim facts would shatter quite.  
Ripe time's full man will surely be  
Humanity's epitome ;

## Wordsworth in Elysium

Rich with life's laughter he shall reign  
With all experience in his brain,  
Bright as a saint, blithe as a boy  
That whistles 'gainst the wind for joy,  
Sharing with jocund sky and sod  
The geniality of God.

Bards that on earth would sigh and sob  
Are wits here, Mr. Thingummybob.  
Such changes, Sir, would make you grieve  
With all your solemn make-believe.  
'Twould shock your maiden aunt to see  
How Heaven exalts clean levity.  
Who'd guess that comely jester there  
Was Dante once, lean Sorrow's heir?  
Surprises wait for prying noses  
In twinkling, clear Elysian closes.  
Who'd think those titterers 'mid the roses  
Sappho and Shelley? Who would guess  
Heaven's dazzling more in earth's dim less?—

## Wordsworth in Elysium

Only the friends of Puck the poet,  
That trip with wisdom lightly, know it.

But hark ! borne crackling down the breeze  
The laughter of Aristophanes !

And here comes beaming royal Will,

Don Juan brewing a jest Byronic,  
Plump Coleridge chewing a German pill,

Bob Southey too with a grin platonic,  
And gay Johnny Keats from Hampstead Hill,  
And Ben the rosy, and Herrick the sturdy,  
And — bless me ! — there's John ! — he gives  
me a thrill —

John Milton twining a hurdy-gurdy ! . . .  
Sir, love to friends in Headingley,

Still

Your winking penitent,

WILLIAM WORDY.

## INNOCENCE

She touches earth with feet of light ;  
    A fay among the flowers,  
She toys with beauty ; in her sight  
    Time spills ethereal hours.

She is the sum of wonders shy ;  
    She breathes in a bright place,  
With elfin mischief in her eye,  
    And music in her face.

The haven she is of raptures gone ;  
    The haunt of hopes to be ;  
Life's fanciful phenomenon ;  
    Love's fair epiphany.



## Innocence

Sweet Joy, whate'er the years may bring  
Time gives thee laughter now ;  
Rich with the riot of the Spring,  
Delight, go revel thou

With lambs, with blossoms, and blithe birds !  
Unteased by thought's pretence —  
That vexes with the gyves of words  
The joys of innocence.

# THE CHILDREN OF THE STREETS

## A PLEA

Sister, thy sister ; brother, lo, thy brother, —  
Another self, the breather of thy breath ;  
All mortal children of one common mother,  
Whose hope is Heaven, whose destiny is Death.

Begot with tears, and reared 'mid scorn arraigning ;  
Bereft of half to which man's honour clings ;  
Outcast, unloved amid the world's disdainings,  
Yet stamped with godhead like the heirs of  
kings,—

Their wrongs sleep not ; and shall the world not  
waken ?

The winds arise and cry on moor and shore ; —  
Hark ! the great Mother for her babes forsaken  
Wails on the midnight, sleepless evermore !

## The Children of the Streets

To-day, to-morrow, and the vast forever  
Lie in this moment. Choose! the worlds  
arrive! —

Waiting the mould of man's divine endeavour;  
Yours is the mission of the stars that strive!

Pale hands beseech you from undawned to-  
morrow,

Sad faces, piteous pale with withering woes,—  
Th' appalling shades of uncreated sorrows  
That live or die as mercy dies or grows —

Hearken! — if this loud world hath ears to  
hearken —

The souls of children, dying secretly,  
Haunt the grey days, and by grim ways that  
darken

The scourgéd Christ climbs still to Calvary!

## THE BUILDER

Two honesties mingled together,  
True stone and a true man's mind,  
Will baffle the wettest weather  
And better the strongest wind.  
Good work is a noble neighbour ;  
We rise by our work or fall :  
I touch my God in my labour,  
And joyously build my wall ;  
Be it wall for a cot or a mansion  
It matters nothing to me ;  
Who builds for his soul's expansion  
The noblest builder he !  
My wall's for the Will that willed it ;  
I knit dumb stone unto stone ;  
Good mortar I add as I build it,  
And *something* I add of my own

## The Builder

To bind the good whole together,  
To perfect a thing that shall stand —  
A *something* that outlasts weather,  
That flows from a true man's hand.  
The while I work I am thinking  
This wall of myself is a part,  
There are deep-felt forces linking  
This thing to my soul and heart ;  
My blood and bone's in my building !  
And I know that the Power divine,  
That the tip of yon spire is gilding,  
Will scorn not this wall of mine.  
And I hold this faith well founded,  
And I grip it tight to my soul,  
That a builder's work must be grounded  
On God — who is building the whole.















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